

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 18682

LONDON PASS SECDEF RUMSFELD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: NATO, OCON, AWACS, MILI

SUBJECT: ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR NATO AEW (AWACS) PROGRAM

REF: STATE 265681

1. LAST NIGHT (NOV 15) I HAD OPPORTUNITY TO CALL ON DEFMIN LATTANZIO PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR LONDON. LATTANZIO HAD BEEN BRIEFED BY HIS STAFF ON AEW. HE INDICATED HE AGREED ENTIRELY WITH THE POINTS I MADE ON THE RATIONALE FOR A NATO AEW SYSTEM. RECOGNIZING THE NEED AND URGENCY, HE NONETHELESS ASSERTED HE COULD NOT UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS OF ECONOMIC CRISIS (AND MINORITY GOVERNMENT) GO BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT TO SEEK FUNDS FOR ITALIAN PARTICIPATION. HOWEVER, HE ASSURED ME THAT AS SOON AS CONDITIONS PERMIT, THE GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE THE QUESTION OF SUPPORT FOR AEW TO THE PARLIAMENT. HE INDICATED IN THE COURSE OF CONVERSATION THAT BOTH CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF VIGLIONE AND CHIEF OF AIR FORCE STAFF CIARLO FAVOR ITALIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE NATO AEW. (WE KNEW ABOUT VIGLIONE'S SUPPORT BUT CIARLO'S REPRESENTS A COMPLETE ABOUT
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FACE.)

2. AT MY REPEATED URGING, LATTANZIO INDICATED HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO EXPRESS ITALY'S SUPPORT AT THE DPC FOR NATO ACQUISITION OF THE AEW SYSTEM IN PRINCIPLE BUT IT WOULD HAVE TO BE SO FORMULATED AS TO CONSTITUTE NO FINANCIAL ENGAGEMENT AT THAT TIME.

3. LATTANZIO EXPRESSED HIS INTEREST IN VISITING THE U.S. AND HOPED SOMETHING COULD BE WORKED OUT "IN FEBRUARY OR MARCH OF NEXT YEAR".

4. COMMENT: OUR RECENT SERIES OF DISCUSSIONS SEEMS TO HAVE BORNE SOME FRUIT. EVEN AN AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE REPRESENTS A CONSIDERABLE ADVANCE THROUGH THE THICKET OF RESERVATIONS ABOUT AEW THAT WE HAVE BEEN ENCOUNTERING IN ROME OVER THE PAST YEAR OR SO. IF LATTANZIO CAN IN FACT EXPRESS THAT AGREEMENT AT THE DPC, IT MAY MEET OUR MOST URGENT NEED AT THAT MEETING. MEANWHILE I BELIEVE THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER ENCOURAGING THE ITALIAN POSITION BY MAKING EXPLICIT THE EXTENT TO WHICH FUNDING FLEXIBILITY CAN EASE THE BURDEN OF ITALIAN PARTICIPATION (THE CONTINUED LACK OF THE TAB B TABLES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT OF THE AIDE MEMOIRE HAS PUT US AT A DISADVANTAGE IN THIS REGARD). IT SEEMS CLEAR TO ME THAT THE ITALIANS HAVE COME THIS FAR TOWARD ACCEPTANCE OF A NATO AEW ON LARGELY POLITICAL TERMS, PRIMARILY IN RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO IT. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, I WOULD URGE SECRETARY RUMSFELD TO MEET WITH LATTANZIO AT BRUSSELS BOTH TO REINFORCE THE GOI'S TENUOUS AEW COMMITMENT AND AS A MARK OF APPRECIATION FOR THE SPECIAL EFFORT THE GOI IS MAKING UNDER TRYING CONDITIONS. VOLPE

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